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BONUS
TALE

ZOMBIES
HYMN
OF THE
XOMBIES

hymn of the zombies

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Hymn of the Xombies

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hymn of the zombies

Snow drifted down in delicate flakes over Winter Hollow's town square, dusting the cobblestones and catching in the glow of wreathed lampposts. The crowd pressed shoulder-to-shoulder around the carolers, their breaths visible in the crisp December air.

"Silent night, holy night," the carolers sang, their harmonies rising above the murmur of the gathered townspeople. Sarah Mitchell conducted from the front, her red scarf swaying with each gentle movement of her arms.

"Mom, I can't see," eight-year-old Tommy tugged at his mother's coat sleeve.

"Here, up you go." John Cooper hoisted his nephew onto his shoulders. "Better view from up there, right champ?"

The carolers moved into their next song, "O Come All Ye Faithful," when the wind shifted—the gentle snowfall transformed in seconds. Dark clouds rolled in, blotting out the afternoon sun.

"That doesn't look right," someone muttered in the crowd.

The temperature plummeted. Wind howled through the square, whipping scarves and coats. People stumbled backward, shielding their faces from the stinging ice crystals.

"Tommy, get down!" John reached for his nephew as the boy's teeth began to chatter.

The carolers' voices faltered. Their sheet music scattered in the wind like startled birds.

"Everyone inside!" Mayor Wallace shouted from the steps of the town hall. "Move!"

But the storm descended too fast. Ice crystallized on clothes, on skin, on hair. Sarah Mitchell's arms froze mid-gesture, her mouth

open in an unfinished note. One by one, the carolers turned to ice sculptures, their faces locked in expressions of surprise and terror.

"Help!" Tommy's voice cracked as frost crept up his boots. John lunged forward, but his feet wouldn't move. Ice spread across the cobblestones like spilled paint.

Screams cut short as the freezing wave swept through the crowd. Within seconds, the town square transformed into a garden of ice statues. Frozen townspeople stood like mannequins, caught in their final moments of panic - a mother reaching for her child, an elderly man mid-stride, a dog with its tail between its legs.

The blizzard dissipated as quickly as it had appeared, leaving only the sound of crackling ice and the hollow wind whistle through the square.

The ice crackled across Sarah Mitchell's face, her conductor's smile preserved in crystalline perfection. The other carolers stood frozen in their neat rows, sheet music scattered at their feet like fallen leaves. Their faces held that same unsettling grin, teeth gleaming behind lips of frost.

"Get to the church!" Mayor Wallace's voice carried over the panicked crowd. People slipped and stumbled across the icy cobblestones, desperate to escape the supernatural cold.

The bakery's bell jingled as Mrs. Henderson yanked people inside. The bookshop's windows rattled with those pounding to get in. Doors slammed throughout the square as the townspeople barricaded themselves from the otherworldly winter.

Hours crawled by. The frozen carolers stood sentinel in the empty square, shadows lengthening around their rigid forms as the sunset. Darkness crept in, broken only by the dim glow of the street lamps.

From his second-floor window at the Winter Hollow Inn, John Cooper watched the square, Tommy huddled against him, wrapped in blankets. The town clock struck midnight, its chimes echoing through the silent streets.

A crack split the air like breaking glass. John pressed closer to

the window. Sarah Mitchell's frozen form shuddered, ice falling away in sheets as her head turned with a grinding sound. Her eyes snapped open - brilliant, electric blue.

One by one, the other carolers broke free of their icy prisons. Their movements were jerky, puppet-like as they reformed their rows. Their footsteps crunched on the ice-covered ground.

"Uncle John?" Tommy whispered. "What's happening to them?"

The carolers opened their mouths in unison. The sound that emerged wasn't human - a twisted version of their earlier songs. Notes clashed and warped, creating a cacophony that made John's teeth ache. The discordant hymn echoed off the buildings, growing louder with each verse.

Sarah's arms rose, conducting once more. Her frozen joints creaked with each movement, ice crystals cascading from her sleeves. The possessed choir's eyes pulsed with that same haunting blue light as their broken melody filled the night.

The twisted melody swelled, and the clouds above Winter Hollow churned. Lightning flashed - not yellow, but an otherworldly blue that matched the carolers' eyes. The temperature dropped so fast that the air itself seemed to crystallize.

"Get away from the window!" John yanked Tommy back as frost crawled up the glass like skeletal fingers.

The hymn pierced through walls and doors, burrowing into people's minds. Down in the lobby, a man stumbled to his feet.

"Such beautiful music," he mumbled, shuffling toward the exit.

"Frank, stop!" The innkeeper grabbed his arm. "You can't go out there!"

But Frank shrugged him off, drawn by the song. The door swung open, letting in a blast of arctic air. The moment Frank stepped outside, ice-encased him. His skin turned blue, then white, then transparent as crystal. His eyes snapped open, glowing with that same electric blue.

The storm raged harder. Snow piled against buildings in minutes, sealing doors and windows. Ice spreads through cracks

and keyholes, under doors, and through ventilation ducts.

More people emerged from their homes, entranced by the choir's call. Mrs. Henderson from the bakery. The postman. The librarian. One by one, they froze solid before jerking back to life, their movements stiff and unnatural.

"The whole town's turning into them," John whispered, holding Tommy close as they watched from between the curtains.

The growing horde of frozen townspeople joined the carol, their voices creating an unholy chorus that made the walls vibrate. Windows shattered. Paint peeled. The very air seemed to freeze and crack.

Sarah Mitchell's arms were conducted with mechanical precision, ice trailing from her fingertips as she directed her growing choir. The infected spread through the streets, their song drawing more victims into the killing cold.

Winter Hollow disappeared under the supernatural blizzard, buildings encased in ice sheets as thick as castle walls. The town transformed into a frozen wasteland, the only movement coming from the jerky, puppet-like steps of the Xombie horde as they searched for fresh voices to add to their eternal hymn.

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Evelyn gripped her leather-bound journal like the fragile, yellowed pages might offer salvation. The church sanctuary was a tomb of whispers and shallow breaths, where a dozen survivors huddled in borrowed robes and altar cloths, their frostbitten faces pale with fear. The cold pressed through the stained glass like an invading force, creeping across the floor in glistening, crystalline fingers.

"The Frostborn." Her finger traced the faded ink of an illustration - frozen figures with glowing eyes. "I've read about this. An ancient curse that spreads through song, turning victims into vessels of winter itself."

Jonah peered over her shoulder at the weathered pages. "Like a

virus made of sound?"

"Exactly." She flipped through the journal. "The original outbreak happened in 1847. A traveling choir brought it to town, but the details of how they stopped it..." Her voice trailed off as ice crystals formed on the windows, distorting the colored glass.

The hymn grew louder outside, its discordant notes making the candles flicker. A woman near the front doors pressed her hands over her ears, humming to block out the sound.

"Wait." Evelyn's eyes darted to the bell tower. "The church bell - Brother Thomas forged it during the first outbreak. He blessed the iron with ancient wards against curses."

Jonah grabbed a flashlight from his backpack. "So we ring the bell?"

"Its sound could disrupt the Frostborn's hold." She traced the tower's outline in the darkness. "Break their connection to the cursed song."

"The bell rope snapped last month," Father Matthews called from across the sanctuary. "We were waiting for repairs."

"Then we climb." Jonah clicked on his flashlight. "I can make it up there."

The wooden steps to the bell tower creaked under their feet as they ascended into darkness. Below, the survivors' prayers mingled with the otherworldly chorus growing ever closer to the church doors.

Frozen wind whipped through the bell tower's open arches as Evelyn and Jonah climbed the final steps. Ice coated the wooden railings, forcing them to grip the frost-slick walls.

"They're inside." Evelyn's torch cast wild shadows across the tower walls. Below, the hymn rose to a fever pitch as footsteps echoed through the church.

The bell hung silently above them, its bronze surface etched with symbols that caught the torchlight. A sheet of ice covered the clapper, transforming it into a crystalline spike.

Jonah wrapped his scarf around his hands. "Cover me while I

clear the ice."

The first of the Frostborn appeared at the tower entrance. Their skin gleamed like polished ice, faces locked in expressions of perpetual song. The air temperature plummeted as their voices joined together.

Evelyn thrust her torch forward. The flames sent ripples through the air, forcing the frozen choir back. "The fire disrupts their connection. Keep going!"

Jonah scraped at the bell's clapper, his borrowed gloves already stiff with frost. Chips of ice rained down as he worked.

More Frostborn pressed up the stairs, their song building into harmonics that made Evelyn's teeth ache. She swung the torch in an arc, driving them back. "Whatever you're going to do, do it fast!"

"Almost there." Jonah's breath came out in clouds as he cleared the last ice.

A blast of arctic air extinguished Evelyn's torch. The Frostborn surged forward, their voices rising to glass-shattering intensity. Ice crystals formed in the air around them, slicing into exposed skin.

Jonah grabbed the bell rope. His fingers, numb with cold, slipped on the frozen hemp. The Frostborn's song reached a crescendo that shook the snow from the rafters.

"Ring it!" Evelyn backed against the bell as the frozen choir advanced, their glowing eyes fixed on her. Ice crept across her boots, anchoring her to the floor.

Jonah wrapped the rope around his arm and threw his weight backward.

The bell's first peal shattered the frozen air like thunder. Ancient symbols along its surface flared with golden light, their power awakening after decades of silence. The sound cut through the Frostborn's song, fracturing their harmonics into discordant fragments.

Evelyn pressed her hands against her ears as the bell's resonance built upon itself, each strike sending visible ripples

through the air. The Frostborn's voices faltered, their ice-glazed forms trembling.

"It's working!" Jonah hauled on the rope again. The bell's deep tone penetrated bone and stone, drowning out all other sounds.

Cracks appeared in the Frostborn's crystalline skin, spreading like spider webs across their faces. Their song dissolved into broken notes as the bell's power tore through their cursed forms. They crumbled one by one - first to ice, then to powdery snow scattered across the tower floor.

The supernatural cold retreated with each toll of the bell. Below, more crashes echoed through the church as the rest of the frozen choir met the same fate. The hymn that had haunted the town for days faded into whispers, then silence.

Jonah let the rope slip from his raw hands. "Is it over?"

Evelyn stumbled toward the tower's edge. Outside, the storm had broken. Moonlight spilled across the town, illuminating piles of snow where the Frostborn had fallen. The bitter wind died to nothing, leaving only the crisp smell of winter.

Her legs gave out as exhaustion crashed over her. She sank into a drift of fresh powder, her breath forming clouds in the still air. Above, stars emerged from clearing skies, their light reflecting off the untouched snow that blanketed the silent streets.

The bell's final echo faded into the night, leaving the town in perfect stillness beneath the pale moon's watch.

Dawn painted the horizon pale orange as Evelyn and Jonah stepped out of the church. Their boots crunched through fresh powder, breaking the morning silence. Steam rose from their breath in the crisp air.

"Look." Jonah pointed toward Main Street. Small groups of townspeople emerged from buildings, wrapped in blankets and supporting each other. Their faces bore patches of frostbite; skin bleached white from the supernatural cold.

Father Matthews waved from the church steps. "The rest made it. Twenty-three souls safe inside."

They crossed the town square past frozen lampposts and ice-encrusted benches. Where the cursed choir had gathered, only scattered remnants remained - woolen scarves half-buried in drifts, a few knit hats poking through the snow like colorful mushrooms.

Evelyn knelt beside a red scarf, its tassels stiff with frost. Her fingers traced the hand-stitched initials in one corner. "Mary Peterson. She taught piano at the elementary school."

"We couldn't save them." Jonah's shoulders slumped as he surveyed the square.

"They were already gone." Evelyn stood, brushing snow from her knees. "The moment they joined the song."

The rising sun caught the church's bell tower, making the bronze glow like fire. Below, more survivors stumbled into the square, drawn by the light and warmth. Their voices carried across the snow in whispers and sobs as they recognized items left behind by lost friends and family.

Evelyn watched a young girl pick up a familiar blue hat, clutching it to her chest. "Some songs should stay forgotten."

The Xombies had vanished with the night, leaving only destruction and grief. But the town still stood, its people battered but unbroken. They had survived this attack, though none could say if it would be the last.

As dawn's first light crept over the frozen town, a stray thread of sound whispered on the wind. The melody was a haunting reminder of the cursed hymn, its discordant notes piercing the crisp air like shards of ice. The survivors' movements faltered, their eyes locking onto some distant point as the sound insinuated into their minds. Fear's chill grip tightened around their hearts, slowing their breathing to a hesitant rhythm. Evelyn's gaze drifted toward the hills, her pupils dilating as if searching for the source of the haunting refrain. And then, as suddenly as it began, the melody vanished – leaving behind only the echoes of memory and the unspoken promise of a terror yet to come.

also by z.k. walker

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